

STORIES SERIES, NUMBER SIX

WOMEN, FLOWERS AND MOTHER'S DAY

Christian Dior once said “After women, flowers are the most lovely thing God has given the world.” During Victorian times, some men may have been a little shy and hesitant to show their true feelings to those lovely women, and so they chose to communicate through flowers. A tussy-mussy was the emoji of the day. We recently hosted special tours of Linden Place which focused on the women of the mansion, and at each stop we imagined the possible flower choices for bouquets or tussy-mussies that would be appropriate for each fabulous female.

During Victorian times, “floriology” was the use of flowers as emotional proxies – or, as Lady Mary Wortley Montague once said, a way to say thanks “without ever inking your fingers.” There was no shortage of floral dictionaries – those written for the receiver, so she could look up each flower by name and meaning; and those written for the sender, so he could look up every emotion to express by flower. Depth of feeling could be intimated by depth of color – from the shy sweet blush of a pink rose to the smoldering crimson fire of a blood red rose. If the lady held her bouquet – or tussy-mussy – with her *left* hand and positioned it down and away from her bosom, she was just not that into you. But aaaahhh, held in the *right* hand, close to her heart – game on! Our tradition of today’s bridal bouquet and its placement is a throwback to the tussy-mussy.



We began our tour in the front parlor, by the portrait of Abigail D’Wolf, wife of Mark Anthony. Married in 1744, mother to 15 children, the first born when she was 18 and the last when she was 42, her skin is sagging, her eyes clouded. A writer once described her as ‘a woman with a face the color of a potato.’ Mark Anthony was a humble sailor, the right-hand man of Simeon Potter. Mark never had more than a modest income. He and Abigail struggled to feed their children and keep a roof over their heads. When their home was burned by the British during the Revolution, they were forced to move to Somerset and live with Potter. The family wealth did not begin to accumulate until their children “became merchant captains...and made themselves men of mark in the town and state” as Wilfred Munro wrote in his history of Bristol.¹ Those children included Charles, father of the builder of the mansion, and James, father of the second owner-occupant of the mansion. So for Abigail, long suffering wife and mother of fifteen, we offer a bouquet of blue bells for constancy; fig tree leaves for fertility; and moss for maternal love.

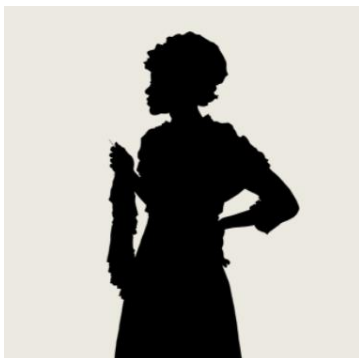
Wandering into the back parlor, we observed the portrait of Charlotte Patten Goodwin, sweet faced, doe-eyed, in a soft pink dress, who in 1804 married George DeWolf, the builder of Linden Place. It was her mother Mary Bradford who sold George the land on which he built his mansion, the D’Wolf Homestead, in 1810. But George was a flamboyant man, a somewhat reckless man, and bankruptcy

forced him to hurriedly pack up his wife and children and flee to his plantation in Cuba in 1825. So for demure Charlotte we offer a bouquet of white lilac for youthful innocence, pennyroyal for sudden flight, and dahlia for instability.

When we visited the conservatory, we thought of Poor Sarah and her heroic efforts to keep the house going after the death of her husband William Henry. Around 1834 this son of James D'Wolf became the second owner/occupant of the house. But he was not a clever or successful businessman like his father. He was also cruel to Sarah, and his dalliances were as sharp and painful as a thorn on a rose. When finally he was rewarded by President Franklin Pierce with a job as ambassador to Scotland in 1853, he had the misfortune of dying before serving even one day on the job. Sarah was the daughter of Reverend Doctor William Rogers, first graduate of Brown University. He received his license to preach in 1771 and moved to Philadelphia to preside over a Baptist church there. His grand-daughter Sarah's and William's first child, Rosalie, is born in 1826. By a cruel twist of fate, both William in 1853 and Sarah in 1855 die in the New York home of their daughter Rosalie and her husband John Hopper. So, for Poor Sarah, we offer a bouquet of yellow carnations for the disdain she suffered, sweet scabies for the widowhood thrust upon her, and sprigs of box tree for her stoicism.



Rosalie D'Wolf, daughter of William and Sarah, was actually born in the Perry Homestead at the corner of High and Union Streets. Soon after her birth the family moved into the D'Wolf Homestead at 500 Hope Street and there six more children were born to them. The Bristol Phoenix of January 1910 reported "Miss Rosalie was considered the most beautiful and attractive girl in Bristol, having a charm of manner and personality that remained with her all her life." Despite the fact that her father added a small ballroom to the house in anticipation of his daughters' marriages, Rosalie eloped in 1847. It may well be that the reason was her choice of husband – John Hopper, New York City lawyer and son of Isaac Tatem Hopper, one of the most famous Philadelphia Quaker abolitionists of America. Knowing of the slave-trading history of the family the biographer of Isaac Tatem Hopper wrote: "When one of his sons married into a family educated under influences totally foreign to Quaker principles, he was somewhat disturbed, but he at once adopted the bride as a beloved daughter of his heart, and she ever after proved a lovely and thornless Rose in the pathway of his life." In a twist worthy of any Victorian novel it is noted: "Great was his satisfaction when he discovered she was a grandchild of Reverend Doctor William Rogers....(who) was associated with his earliest recollections, for when he was on his visits to Uncle Tatem, at six years old, he went to meeting with him.....(and) Dr. Rogers was the first minister he ever saw in the pulpit."ⁱⁱ Rosalie DeWolf Hopper, widowed when quite young, went on to live a long and productive life. For her bouquet we offer multiflora rose for grace; French willow for bravery, and spruce pine for hope in adversity.



We took the magnificent circular staircase to the second floor on our tour, but first we stopped at the plain and worn back servants' stairs. We honored the women whose feet touched these boards – one an enslaved African, name unknown, life unknown, listed by a simple stroke on the 1810 Census. Later in the history of the house, the feet of immigrant women working hard to reach the American dream tread

here. For them we create a bouquet of dogwood for durability and royal fern for dreams, perfumed with cloves for dignity.

Upstairs in the mansion we paid tribute to two women with difficult husbands who persevered, dedicated themselves to their children, and lived lives of grace.



The numerous peccadillos of Samuel P. Colt weighed heavily on Dot Bullock, violet-eyed daughter of the Judge. And so she and Pom, married in 1881, united by three children, by 1896 have agreed to a mutual separation and paths that rarely crossed. Her bouquet contains rhododendrons as a warning to beware; the white cherry blossom of deception, and yellow acacia which represents secret love – his – and perhaps hers.

In 1909, their son Russell swept a young actress named Ethel Barrymore off her feet. She writes in her autobiography: “So Russell Colt sat down; and after that, well, it just happened. That’s all. Quickly. Very quickly. It didn’t take me long to discover that this was it and that this time there was no escape.” Sadly, Russell’s behavior mirrored that of his father. Although they divorced in 1923, Ethel never remarried. Neither did she did play the blame game. She writes, poignantly, “I think that both my brothers and I were born under a dark star so that there was no such thing for us as enduring happiness.....I do not want to blame anybody for the failure of my marriage – except, perhaps, that star.”ⁱⁱⁱ For beautiful, talented, dazzling Ethel: a yellow rose for infidelity; a white chrysanthemum for goodbye; and jasmine for grace and elegance.



So for this Mother’s Day – for all the women of Linden Place: the famous inhabitants, the hard-working volunteers, the women who choose to be wed here, our generous and supportive members and donors, and most especially to the legendary Elizabeth Stansfield whose brave decision as the last surviving grandchild of Samuel P. Colt was to turn down a developer’s offer and instead entrust the property and its legacy to the Friends of Linden Place - our biggest and brightest bouquet is to all of you: lupine for imagination, trails of ivy for fidelity, and honeysuckle for generosity.^{iv}

Here’s to strong women: may we know them, may we be them, may we raise them.

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The author Lynn Smith is a Member of the Board of the Friends of Linden Place, a volunteer in the gift shop, and from time to time gives guided tours of the mansion. The information contained herein, although not guaranteed, is considered to be accurate and reliable. As always, comments, suggestions and input are all greatly appreciated.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Munro, Wilfred Harold, *“The History of Bristol, RI”*; JA and RA Reid Publishers, 1880

ⁱⁱ Child, Lydia Maria, *“Isaac Hopper”*; published in 1853; reprinted by The Perfect Library in 2020

ⁱⁱⁱ Barrymore, Ethel, *“Memories”*; Harper Brothers, 1955

^{iv} *Flower Meanings*, www.allflorists.co.uk